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Memorialisation, Commemoration and Commodification: Massenet and Caricature

CLAIR ROWDEN

Abstract: This article addresses the physical presence of Jules Massenet in the media during the Third Republic in France through the lens of the caricatural press and the cartoon parodies of his operas which appeared in journals such as *Le Journal amusant* and *Le Charivari*. Although individual works were rarely outright successes in critical terms during his lifetime, Massenet's operas always stimulated debate and Massenet, as a figure head for a national art, was revered by both the state and its people. Drawing on theories of parody and readership, I argue that despite the 'ephemeral' nature of these musical artefacts, they acted as agents of commemoration of the composer and of memorialisation and commodification of his works for both operagoers and those who rarely entered the opera theatre.

In 2012, the centenary of the death of Jules Massenet, France's most prolific and important opera composer during the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, various modest celebrations were held in Paris and in his home town of Saint-Etienne. Outside of France scant attention was paid to this centenary, and even the commemorative attempts by the French were somewhat lukewarm.¹ The mild disdain of the French for Massenet and his works today can be contrasted to his reception in France at the height of his career: although individual works were rarely outright successes in critical terms, they always elicited copious column inches, and Massenet as a 'chef d'école', an establishment figure and a 'national treasure' was highly visible. It is this 'visibility' that I address here: through the lens of the iconographical and, more particularly, caricatural press, I assess Massenet's 'physical presence' in the media during his career, drawing on theories of parody, reading

¹ The Paris Opéra unambitiously programmed a new production of the ever-popular *Manon* with a director and a creative team who ripped out the opera's heart and soul: both literally, by making unfounded and dramatically incomprehensible cuts to the score and by mixing styles and periods of costumes in a half-hearted attempt at an intemporal setting, and figuratively, by deliberately interpreting the opera 'against the grain', thereby mocking the work, its conventions and opera's performing traditions in general. The Opéra-Comique, which has been playing the 'patrimony card' to the full in recent seasons, programmed no Massenet for the centenary year, and only a study day and concert, initiated in collaboration with Opéra-Comique dramaturge Agnès Terrier, was slipped into the first part of the 2012–13 season. The Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra produced an extremely modest exhibition titled *La Belle Époque de Massenet* and an accompanying catalogue, which, despite its undisputed beauty, is dominated by a long article reiterating worn-out, early twentieth-century stereotypes in the reception of Massenet, his works and his success, in particular those of the composer as superficial, manipulative, money-grabbing, or a control freak. See my review of the exhibition catalogue, *La Belle Époque de Massenet*, ed. Christophe Ghristi and Mathias Auclair (Montreuil, 2011), in *L'Avant-scène Opéra: Opéra et mise-en-scène Robert Carsen*, 269 (July/August 2012), 166. The Bibliothèque nationale de France oversaw both this catalogue and an afternoon 'Célébration Massenet' in January 2012 at which librarians and musicologists presented research dealing with the library's collections and holdings.

and readership, memorialisation and the commodification of memory. Although the pairing of memorialisation and caricature may seem paradoxical, this article aims precisely to explain and undermine that paradox. For, although cartoons and caricatures of Massenet and his operas formed part of an increasing trend in the reception of cultural artworks via amusement or distraction,² their commodification and the way in which these consumer products were received gave rise to new opportunities to memorialise the composer and his works.

The impetus for commemoration is based in religious ritual, for to commemorate is to sanctify and to consecrate. Ritual tends to destabilise established forms and 'truths' to reintegrate and renew the sense of those things/events/processes that have been ritualised.³ French Republican society has never had any qualms about merely laicising and adopting religious rites and ceremony, and from the earliest days of the first Republic, political commemoration has defined French political mores. The commemorative gestures of the Third Republic, the only secular republican state in Europe at the time, actively created heroes and narratives of its musical and operatic history, thus displaying the nation's attachment to particular values (although, correspondingly, these processes could also furnish an opportunity to those who wished to distance themselves from those values or to uphold others). Massenet's hard-won place as an operatic 'hero' of the Third Republic was clearly seen as worthy of memorialisation and commemoration during his lifetime. No statues were erected and no street names rebaptised while Massenet was alive, yet he garnered the official accolades of Republican society. Moreover, his prolificacy assured him and his works regular coverage in the French press. Although readers may well have been familiar with the critical reception of an opera from the written press, visual parodies and caricatures of his operas were created by highly skilled artists and writers in a diverse and relatively far-reaching press. The immediacy of these entertaining drawings resulted in an ever-present image of a composer memorialised.

Alexander Rehding deals with various reverential, serious-minded transformations of musical materials and ephemeral musical objects that rarely find themselves in the limelight of musicological attention, but which, when placed in dialogue with the works themselves, are often instrumental in positioning those works in the cultural space they occupy.⁴ Massenet's works, in conjunction with the artefacts that they spawned, can, therefore, establish a network in which the two things mutually reinforce one another's significance. Caricatures of Massenet and parodies of his works which appeared in the press during his career carry out similar cultural work: they are very different manifestations of a similar impulsion to memorialise.

² Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility (Second Version)', in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings, Volume 3, 1935–1938*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Howard Eiland et al., ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA and London, 2002), 99–133, at 120.

³ Jean Davallon, 'Lecture stratégique, lecture symbolique du fait social: Enjeu d'une politologie historique', in *Le Geste commémoratif*, ed. Jean Davallon, Philippe Dujardin and Gérard Sabatier (Lyon, 1994), 7–29.

⁴ Alexander Rehding, *Music and Monumentality: Commemoration and Wonderment in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford and New York, 2009), 14–5.

Rather than embodying democratic satire, as much political caricature is seen to do, parodic drawings of this type bolster the artistic status quo and pay a form of homage to the cultural establishment.⁵

These artefacts come in various forms. The ‘portrait-charge’ brought together many diverse elements to create a compound image and message that nearly always featured a grotesque, oversized head on a small body. Functioning in a similar way to Freudian condensation in the ‘dream work’,⁶ this type of image was often presented on the front cover of artistic and satirical journals, and, being non-narrative in function, it generally involved very small amounts of written text (beneath the image). Caricatures comprising one main drawing functioned in the same way, even when they did not display the grotesque heads. Cartoon parodies, on the other hand, comprised a series of drawings which were narrative in function, filling a whole page (and sometimes two). The parodies are not cartoons in the modern sense, for they do not use cinematic techniques of montage and different types of camera shot, but rather generally represent the full body of the characters and invariably some of the opera’s scenery in the background (see Figs. 1 and 4). (Thus, although in the following pages, I use the terms cartoon parodies and parodies interchangeably, I avoid the term cartoon alone.) Cartoon parodies also include a certain amount of text, generally presented beneath the images, rather than in text bubbles.⁷ Their comprehension is reliant on the co-presence of the verbal and the visual signs, the space beneath the image constituting ‘an access to and an ekphrasis of’ the main ‘text’ and its meaning.⁸

Cartoon Parodies

The caricatural artistic press had a ‘special’ relationship with Massenet and his operas; this reflected the composer’s prominent position in artistic society, for, indeed, *no* parody of one’s opera was almost a sign of failure. The cartoonist Stop (pseudonym of Louis Retz) in particular and the weekly *Le Journal amusant* displayed a fifteen-year commitment (1884–99) to the memorialisation of the composer’s works with *Manon*, *Le Cid*, *Esclarmonde*, *Le Mage*, *Werther*, *Thaïs*, *Sapho* and *Cendrillon* all appearing in cartoon format (*Le Cid* drawn by Henriot, pseudonym of Henri Maigrot). During the same period, the openly monarchist journal

⁵ See my “‘Caricature’ in 1890s Paris”, in *Enhancing Music Iconography Research: Considering the Current, Setting New Trends*, ed. Antonio Baldassare, Debra Pring and Pablo Sotuyo Blanco (Vienna, forthcoming).

⁶ On this concept, see Sigmund Freud, ‘On Dreams’, in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (London, 1995), 142–72; James Hopkins, ‘The Interpretation of Dreams’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Freud*, ed. Jerome Neu (Cambridge, 1991), 86–135; *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey et al., 24 vols.; vol. 8: *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (London, 1960, rpt 1995).

⁷ For discussion of cartoon parodies of works by composers other than Massenet, see my “‘Caricature’ in 1890s Paris”.

⁸ Peter Wagner, ed., *Icons – Texts – Iconotexts: Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediality* (Berlin, 1996), 16 and 28.

Le Triboulet (which presented an odd mix of keen artistic and social satire alongside weekly heraldic plates) frequently published reports about and drew caricatural images of Massenet and his operas. *Le Charivari*, a daily illustrated satirical newspaper edited by Henriot, paid tribute with full-page cartoons dedicated to *Le Roi de Lahore*, *Le Mage* and *Thaïs* by three different authors; and *La Silhouette* featured *Le Cid* and *Thaïs* on its front cover. These caricatural papers flourished at the end of the nineteenth century, as part of the boom in the French popular press which was set in motion by a release from the shackles of censorship (resulting from laws passed in 1881)⁹ and by the increasingly easy and cheap reproduction of images.

Although information regarding print runs of and subscribers to the Parisian newspapers and magazines in which these caricatures abound is hard to find, the images and their accompanying texts were undoubtedly destined for an audience who possessed the 'cultural capital' necessary for deciphering the encoded messages within them.¹⁰ So although knowledge of an opera that is portrayed through parodic drawing is not necessary, it certainly makes up part of the cultural capital of the authors who are, after all, writing and drawing for an initiated readership, their contemporaries and social peers. Undoubtedly therefore, a large proportion of readers of operatic parody were familiar with operatic conventions, as well as with other literary, iconographical, musical and satirical conventions born of a certain class and financial position in society. Moreover, these codes constitute common ground for the author and the reader for maximum comprehension of the parody.¹¹

The parodies of Massenet's operas in Parisian satirical journals adapt the libretto to tell a humorous version of the original story. Authors interpolate familiar French and Parisian locations, nineteenth-century items and procedures, allusions to current affairs (both political and artistic, not to mention scandalous rumours) and contemporary figures (again, both political and/or artistic depending on the bent and readership of the paper), exterior to the story and to opera in general. For example, Stop's drawing of *Le Mage* (in *Le Journal amusant*, reproduced as Fig. 1) plunges the reader immediately into this anachronistic world. The opera, set in ancient Bactria (on the borders of modern-day Iran and Afghanistan), the cradle of Zoroastrianism, is brought closer to home: the defeated Touranians of the original story become the 'Tourangeaux' (the people from the Touraine region of France); thus the external exotic is transformed into the internal exotic. The first frame continues the anachronism: the text affirms that the story is set in

⁹ Jean-Michel Renault, *Censure et caricature: Les images interdites et de combat de l'histoire de la presse en France et dans le monde* (Paris, 2006), 86–8.

¹⁰ In *Distinction* (*La Distinction: Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris, 1979)), Pierre Bourdieu defined cultural capital as knowledge which equips individuals with a competence in deciphering cultural relations and artefacts, a code which is accumulated through a long process of acquisition from schools, the family and social entourage, necessitating time, material and financial means. See Randal Johnson, 'Editor's Introduction', in Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (Cambridge, 1993), 1–25, at 7.

¹¹ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York and London, 1985), 89–94.



Fig. 1: Stop, 'Théâtre de L'Opéra. *Le Mage*', *Le Journal amusant*, 44^e année, no. 1806, 11 April 1891, 4 (courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France)

2000 BCE, yet the battle victor enters wearing a military hat of the Napoleonic period, mounted on a dappled rocking horse and accompanied by a battalion of Napoleonic infantrymen.¹² In a similar way, Stop repatriates Charlotte and Werther from Wetzlar, Germany, to a recognisable Paris, with the Moulin Rouge and the capital's Morris columns in the background (Fig. 2,¹³ top row, last frame and second row, last frame). Such temporal and geographical re-contextualisations of the opera's story highlight the immediacy of the parodic medium and the incisivness of its intertextuality which are, indeed, the keys to the parodies' success.

The cartoon can be viewed as an autonomous literary subgenre with its own structural patterns, as an original mode of communication, and as an interpretative code which the reader already shares with the author and to which the latter refers constantly in order to organise his/her message (as Umberto Eco analysed it).¹⁴ In the early 1880s, the narrative cartoon format of operatic parody is not yet in place. For example, in G. Lafosse's drawing of *Le Roi de Lahore*, which appeared in *Le Charivari* on 6 May 1877, it is hard to follow the correct sequence of images as they are not presented in linear format; and Stop's presentation of *Manon* in *Le Journal amusant* was more just a composite image presenting the different protagonists and artists than a cartoon.¹⁵ By 1885, however, the narrative structure of operatic parodies is provided (up to a point) by the operas' dramatic structure, and the stereotypical characters presented are often already familiar from opera librettos. The operatic genre is not completely destabilised by its parody, therefore, and the view of the characters and the stage setting presented to the reader is one with which the audience member in the opera house is familiar.¹⁶

Stop's first successful cartoon parody (Fig. 3) appeared in *Le Journal amusant* on 1 June 1889 following the première of *Esclarmonde*. In this parody the audience's cultural capital is put to the test, and the level of intertextual detail renders the drawing all the more vibrant and effective. The supernatural powers of Esclarmonde's father, the Emperor Phorcas, are highlighted as he first appears with a wizard's hat and later (bottom row, first frame) is transformed into the figure of Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin (1805–71), an inventor of automata, a magician and the father of modern illusionism. The French knight Roland (top row), despite wearing medieval garb, is decidedly modern, smoking a cigarette and sporting a fedora, and the libretto's constant magical travelling between distant places is replaced by that thoroughly nineteenth-century mode of transportation, the

¹² Other anachronistic visual elements include the traces of contemporary cobbling techniques visible on the soles of the dead men's shoes (Fig. 1, bottom row, first frame).

¹³ The text that has been cut off in Figure 2 reads: "La musique, très suggestive, est de notre illustre maestro Massenet, qui a enfilé délibérément la route de Beyreuth [*sic*]."

¹⁴ Umberto Eco, 'A Reading of Steve Canyon', trans. Bruce Merry, *Twentieth-Century Studies*, 15/16 (December 1976), 18–33, at 32–3.

¹⁵ 'Le Théâtre au Crayon, par G. Lafosse. Théâtre de l'Opéra. Le Roi de Lahore', *Le Charivari*, 46e année, 6 May 1877; and Stop, 'Chronique Théâtrale, – par Stop (Opéra-Comique). Manon', *Le Journal amusant*, 38e année, no. 1431, 2 February 1884, 4.

¹⁶ Contrary to the more modern forms of parodic cartoon and animated cartoon discussed by Jonathan Gray in *Watching with 'The Simpsons': Television, Parody and Intertextuality* (New York and London, 2006), 66.



Fig. 2: Stop, 'Théâtre de l'Opéra-Comique (?). — *Ver de Terre, ou l'Amoureux d'une étoile*', *Le Journal amusant*, 46e année, no. 1901, 4 February 1893, 5 (courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France)

train.¹⁷ Here the train is a miniature version which Roland easily straddles, his 'tail' (his magical and powerful sword) between his legs (second row, middle frame).

Details of a sexual nature were often seized upon for the enjoyment and, to some extent, the greater 'pleasure' of all readers. Indeed, many other illustrated and satirical journals aimed at a mid- to lower-bourgeois audience openly traded in moral satire which represented daring or even dissipated sexual behaviour, often displaying women in various states of undress and in sensual poses, for the purposes of titillation. The frequent presence of scantily clad ballet dancers and cast members and the often explicit sexual nature of the librettos banalised these sorts of images, and the opera parodies capitalised on a certain salacious humour. The *étoile* Rosita Mauri, for instance, appears in many cartoons,¹⁸ often with other nubile ballerinas, while for *Le Mage*, Stop rather unusually steers away from explicit display of female flesh, using the visual shorthand for the corps de ballet behind Mauri by representing the dancers as brooms (brooms = balais = ballet) (Fig. 1, third row, second and third frames). For *Esclarmonde*, the visual substitution for the infamous orchestral interlude which shocked audiences at the premiere by its graphic musical description of the sexual act during the wedding night of Esclarmonde and Roland is also highly vivid.¹⁹ Here, Stop draws a large rose bush (ripe for the picking), its lower half covered by a giant fig leaf, which is framed by a circle and an escutcheon showing Roland's Gallic cock crowned by Esclarmonde's imperial status. The circular form also evokes the magic-lantern slides designed by Eugène Grasset and used to represent Roland hunting in Act I.²⁰ This allusion to Roland's other virile quest in the opera is subtle, but the opera's aficionados could have recognised it; next to Stop's rose bush we see a spent and sleeping Roland, his 'hunting horn' lying indolently on the floor in front of him.²¹

Stop's drawing of Jean Gaussin's night of love with Fanny Legrand from *Sapho* is evoked by the extinguishing of the bedside light – Fanny puts out a (phallic) candle with a conic snuffer – and the promise of what is to follow can be clearly read by Fanny's extended white arm, naked save for the short frilly cap-sleeve of her frivolous nightgown.²² Both Stop (in *Le Journal amusant*) and Tézier (in *Le Charivari*) represent Athanaël in *Thaïs* as a sex-crazed hysteric and at the same

¹⁷ Stop also has Werther take the train when he is first sent away by Charlotte (see Fig. 2, second row, last frame).

¹⁸ See Marais, 'Le Mage', *Le Charivari*; Stop, 'Théâtre de L'Opéra. Le Mage', *Le Journal amusant*; Stop, 'Stop Echos', *Le Journal amusant*, 47^e année, no. 1961, 31 March 1894, 5; Henriot, 'Le Cid. Musique de Massenet', *Le Journal amusant*, 39^e année, no. 1527, 5; Sahib, 'Le Cid à l'Opéra', *La Vie parisienne*, 23^e année, no. 50, 12 December 1885, 701; Bast, 'Le 'Cid' à l'Opéra', *La Silhouette*, 6^e année, no. 507, 6 December 1885.

¹⁹ See Steven Huebner's discussion of this passage in his *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (Oxford, 1999), 82–7.

²⁰ These projections illustrate the article by Patrick Gillis, 'Genèse d'Esclarmonde', *L'Avant-scène Opéra: Massenet Esclarmonde – Grisélidis*, 148 (September/October 1992), 22–33.

²¹ On the press reception of *Esclarmonde*, see Annegret Fauser (ed.), *Jules Massenet – Esclarmonde – Dossier de presse parisienne (1889)* (Weinsberg, 2001).

²² Stop, 'Opéra-Comique. *Sapho*', *Le Journal amusant*, 50^e année, no. 2155, 18 December 1897, 5.

time as Thaïs's therapeutic hypnotist.²³ *Thaïs* is based on a contemporary 'classic' of decadent literature by Anatole France, whose heroine was both a sensual actress and a priestess of Venus. Both the opera and its press reception bathed in the *fin-de-siècle* notions of decadence and degeneracy, whether physical or moral, that crystallised in the theories of hysteria of the well-known and mediated Jean-Martin Charcot.²⁴ Indeed, the further the opera portrayed pushes the limits of 'common decency' (by late nineteenth-century standards), the more sexually explicit the parodic drawings become. Thus, in Stop's cartoon parody Athanaël's headwear is 'perverted', a nightcap becoming a condom on the head of the sleeping yet phallic-like monk whose head is pointing directly towards the naked backside of a Thaïs who appears in his dream.²⁵

Elsewhere, artists often ally torrid love situations, or the most dramatic and impassioned scenes, to adverse weather situations as storms rage, winds blow and lightning flashes in the drawings of scenes between lovers. Such pathetic fallacy is itself parodied in the drawing by Stop (Fig. 2) that replaces the orchestral interlude linking the last two acts of *Werther*. This passage musically represents Charlotte's inner turmoil as much as her external travail to reach Werther through a blizzard, yet here Charlotte (portrayed in silhouette and carrying an umbrella) is battling against far more prosaic heavy rain which is represented by thick slanting lines half obscuring the image (bottom row, first frame).²⁶ Other cartoon parodies link expressions of extreme weather to the heavy or even overloaded nature of Massenet's score.²⁷ For *Le Mage*, Maurice Marais's cartoon for *Le Charivari* (Fig. 4, middle column, third frame) represents the bolts of lightning that accompany the rumbles of thunder heard in the orchestra as Zarastro retreats into the mountains, the text punning on this 'thunder' ('tonnerre') in an expression which implies 'Hell and Damnation!' And when representing scenes where the opera's music becomes dramatic and loaded with percussion, the allusion to kitchenware was inescapable. As the temple burns to the ground in Marais's *Le Mage* cartoon, the words 'chaudronnerie symphonique' (which loosely translates as 'symphonic metalworking') accompany a Parisian fireman (Fig. 4, middle column, bottom frame). Equally in

²³ Stop, 'Stop Echos', *Le Journal amusant*; Tézier, 'Thaïs ou la Tentation de St Antoine à l'Opéra', *Le Charivari*, 61e année, 22 March 1894, 3.

²⁴ For all issues to do with the press reception of the opera, see my *Jules Massenet – Thaïs – Dossier de presse parisienne (1894)* (Heilbronn, 2000). More detailed treatment, as well as reproductions of the caricatures published in the press after the premiere of *Thaïs*, can be found in my 'Opera, Caricature and the Unconscious: Massenet's *Thaïs*, A Case Study', *Music in Art*, 34/1–2 (spring–fall 2009), 274–89.

²⁵ Stop, 'Stop Echos', *Le Journal amusant*.

²⁶ The pun on the title of the opera *Ver de Terre* ('worm') is sustained by the children, drawn as open-mouthed hungry chicks, as they rehearse their carol at the start of the opera (they are described in the text as 'little chickens' with Charlotte as the 'mother hen'), but by the end they have turned into ducks happily 'quacking' under a dying Werther's window (whether this 'quacking' refers to the potentially out-of-tune singing of the children is open to interpretation).

²⁷ Frequently, references to the opera's music are represented by a staff and musical notation, sometimes incongruously attached to the protagonists or else merely in the background. Characters may be drawn in stereotypical gestural poses for dramatic singing heroines, as Henriot does for both Chimène and l'Infante in *Le Cid*. See Henriot, 'Le Cid. Musique de Massenet', *Le journal amusant*.



Fig. 4: Maurice Marais, 'Le Mage', *Le Charivari*, 60e année, 28 March 1891, 3 (courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France)

Lafosse's cartoon of *Le Roi de Lahore*,²⁸ as tempers and passions flare (underpinned in the opera by heightened dramatic music), a furious Scindia thumps the bottom of a saucepan as the text affirms that he hit 'la batterie de cuisine' (which lamely translates as a 'set of saucepans' but with the connotations of percussion and military battery).

The opera's spectacle often becomes the focus of detail in the parody, especially the elaborate costumes of exotic operas. Both Marais and Stop transform the ornate headwear of characters in *Le Mage* into upturned flower pots (with flowers growing out of the top, see Fig. 4, particularly left column, first frame, and Fig. 1, second and third rows), while Lafosse turns the god Indra's headdress into an elaborate and shiny cake mould in his drawing of *Le Roi de Lahore*. In the last, the three-tiered 'biscuit de Savoie' mould shines like a beacon, dotted lines emanating from it in all directions to symbolise its radiance, and the text suggests that spectators needed blue-tinted glasses to shade their eyes from the dazzling spectacle of the 'Paradis d'Indra'. Such transformations seem to ridicule the ornate and extravagant spectacle of Orientalist operas (and ballets) which, nevertheless, held centre stage in Paris for over half a century, France's fascination for Orientalist art having been (and continuing to be) shored up by colonial interests in the Middle East and north Africa.

Thus, although irony and satire are brought to bear in all these parodies – to mock the spectacle or the sexual mores and social reactions of the characters – they are not necessarily parody's prime objective. Despite theories which read parody as a critical, subversive and pedagogical critical tool,²⁹ most scholars agree that parody is a self-reflexive genre, a form of inter-art discourse, a type of repetition with critical distance which mingles filial rejection with respect, an authorised subversion or transgression of recognisable forms and conventions which has the potential to challenge and destroy but also to reiterate, renovate or renew that which is parodied.³⁰ Thus, these parodies reinforce: they inscribe the mocked conventions (whether social, sexual, musical or dramatic) onto themselves, thereby guaranteeing their continued existence. Even for those readers unfamiliar with the original opera and its cast, the parody (and the stereotypes that it vehicles) embodies important societal or cultural values in accordance with a range of tacitly accepted formative rules, directed at the average reader's intelligence, imagination and taste.³¹

Parody, therefore, is not so far removed from the ritual of commemoration described earlier, in the manner in which it destabilises established forms and 'truths' to reintegrate and renew the sense of the objects (material or otherwise) of ritualisation. Thus, once more, these 'ephemeral' cartoon parodies of Massenet's operas can be read as commemorative gestures, as agents of a memorialisation of

²⁸ 'Le Théâtre au Crayon', *Le Charivari*.

²⁹ For example, Laurent Jenny, 'The Strategy of Form', trans. R. Carter, in *French Literary Theory Today: A Reader*, ed. Tzvetan Todorov (Cambridge, 1982), 34–63; Gray, *Watching with 'The Simpsons'*.

³⁰ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 2 and 6.

³¹ Eco, 'A Reading of Steve Canyon', 33.

the composer's success and of his place in Republican society rather than, as is the case with much political caricature, a democratic leveller in the name of cultural, social and aesthetic heterogeneity.³² Moreover, in their commodification of the operatic experience, these musical 'souvenirs', received in the intimate surroundings and comfort of one's own home, demanded a very different kind of engagement from that of the opera house, and they provided the opportunity for an act of private commemoration.³³ For some readers, they could have been a lively and entertaining memory of the operatic performance; for others, they could have been an alternative way of evoking the specificity of the opera house experience, whether they had experienced it or not. For yet another contingent, that specificity was not key: for these readers, the cartoon parodies traded in noteworthy contemporary social, cultural and artistic trends and issues, thus becoming modern, amusing cultural artefacts in their own right. Consumption of these commodities fed into their various audiences' operatic literacy – although this was not necessarily their primary function.

The 'Portrait-Charge'

By the mid-1880s, the 'portrait-charge' was a tried and tested formula. Its message and effectiveness was perhaps even more immediate than the cartoon parodies (which necessitated the reading of the text) for those readers who could easily decipher the visual messages, although necessarily the level of intertextuality was rarely as complex as in the parodies. Thus, the 'portraits-charges' celebrated the highest achievements of culture in 'an immediately appreciable form, their intellectually demanding and often elitist nature notwithstanding'.³⁴ In this transformation from music/musical figure to musical artefact, the 'front-page' presentation of the subject and the high-level status such positioning conferred rendered the physical object an all the more palpable and collectable commodity.

Massenet himself, in conjunction with performance of his operas, became the target of a number of these drawings.³⁵ Charges are most frequent from around the time of *Le Cid* (1885) when Massenet became the uncontested 'chef de l'école française'. His setting of a libretto based on a classic of French literary heritage, the premiere of which was timed to coincide with the 200th anniversary of the death of Corneille, reinforced this notion. Indeed, as Annegret Fauser has pointed

³² In Mikhail Bakhtin's description of the carnivalesque, parodic laughter becomes a triumphant leveller, not subjective, not individual, but issuing from a collective conscience of a single social group. It can be festive, regenerative, cathartic. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN, 1984), 59–144, especially 90–92.

³³ On these concepts, see Rehding, *Music and Monumentality*, 78.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

³⁵ Katharine Ellis has demonstrated how, in an earlier period, such charges were often commissioned by the lampooned subject; I have found no documents to suggest this with regard to Massenet. Ellis, 'The Fair Sax: Women, Brass-Playing and the Instrument Trade in 1860s Paris', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 124 (1999), 221–54. Other swiftly drawn caricatures, of Massenet the man, appear in archival iconographic holdings; in this article I concentrate on those that appeared in the press and so reached a wide audience familiar with the composer's works.

out, since Wagner was dead and his works had not yet reached Parisian stages (save the disastrous 1861 *Tannhäuser* and the 1869 *Rienzi*³⁶), and since Verdi had gone decidedly quiet (*Otello* and *Falstaff* not arriving in Paris until 1894), Massenet was not only the consecrated head of a national school but also the principal exponent of a larger European artform and the most active opera composer in Europe at the time.³⁷ The artist Manuel Luque twice featured Massenet: first as his ‘homme du jour’ (man of the day) in *La Caricature* on 5 December 1885, immediately following the première of *Le Cid* (Fig. 5); second as one of his ‘hommes d’aujourd’hui’ (modern men), probably in 1887, as part of a long-running series published in pamphlet format and featuring high-profile artists, writers and composers (Fig. 6).³⁸ In 1885 Luque drew a sombre, thin Massenet, dressed as a Spaniard with a guitar strapped to his back, dancing and clacking away on the castanets, one hand held aloft, the other behind his back. Tucked beneath his arm is a scroll, with *Le Cid* marked across it: resembling a huge cigar, it is a symbol of Massenet’s artistic potency. As he stomps and clacks, musical notes fly off in all directions, as if Massenet’s idiom is as (perceivedly) free and easy as this dance number. Luque’s second charge shows a similarly melancholy and skinny Massenet sitting cross-legged on the staff lines which bend under his weight. He has a bifolio of manuscript paper on his lap and a feather quill in his hand as if he is relaxedly composing. The unrealistic notes on the staff seem to ping off the stretched lines into the air above Massenet where they are distorted to look almost like flowers or even birds. Massenet is framed by/leans back on a heart-shaped pink-shaded background. This Massenet seems to be Massenet ‘le chantre de l’amour’ (the precentor of love), the prolific and intimate painter of the ‘histoire de l’âme féminine’ (history of the female soul), as Debussy infamously remarked in 1901.³⁹

But the artistic notoreity and cultural position *Le Cid* afforded to Massenet was reflected in *La Nouvelle Lune* which gave over its title page to a composer, as it rarely did, in November 1885 with an engraving by Coll-Toc (Fig. 7). Massenet is placed in front of the Opéra and a statue of Corneille and is represented as a young, dashing conquering hero – a modern Cid – in fencing posture, brandishing not a foil but a tuning fork. He duels with his art – perhaps for the supremacy of his art over Corneille’s – as he tramples the leaves of his laureate on which lies a copy of his score. Massenet’s enthronement at the Opéra, that highly subsidised

³⁶ Press dossiers of the reception of both these works in the Parisian press can be found on the web resource ‘Francophone Music Criticism 1789–1914’ at <http://music.sas.ac.uk/fmc>.

³⁷ Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World’s Fair* (Rochester, 2005), 67. Fauser notes that during the 1880s and until the rise of Puccini in the mid-1890s, the most important modern composer represented by the publisher Ricordi (in Italy and much of the rest of the world) was Massenet.

³⁸ The text accompanying Luque’s second charge refers to Massenet’s recent completion of *Werther*, suggesting that it dates from 1887. The close succession of these two charges by the same artist could suggest Massenet’s commissioning of at least one of the drawings, or his prominent and all-pervasive position in operatic culture at that precise time.

³⁹ Monsieur Croche, ‘D’ “Ève” à “Grisélidis”’, *La Revue blanche*, 1 December 1901, reproduced in Claude Debussy, *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits*, ed. François Lesure (Paris, 1987), 59–61, at 59.



Fig. 5: Manuel Luque, 'Les Hommes du Jour. L'auteur du *Cid*, M. Massenet', *La Caricature*, no. 310, 5 December 1885, 388 (courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France)

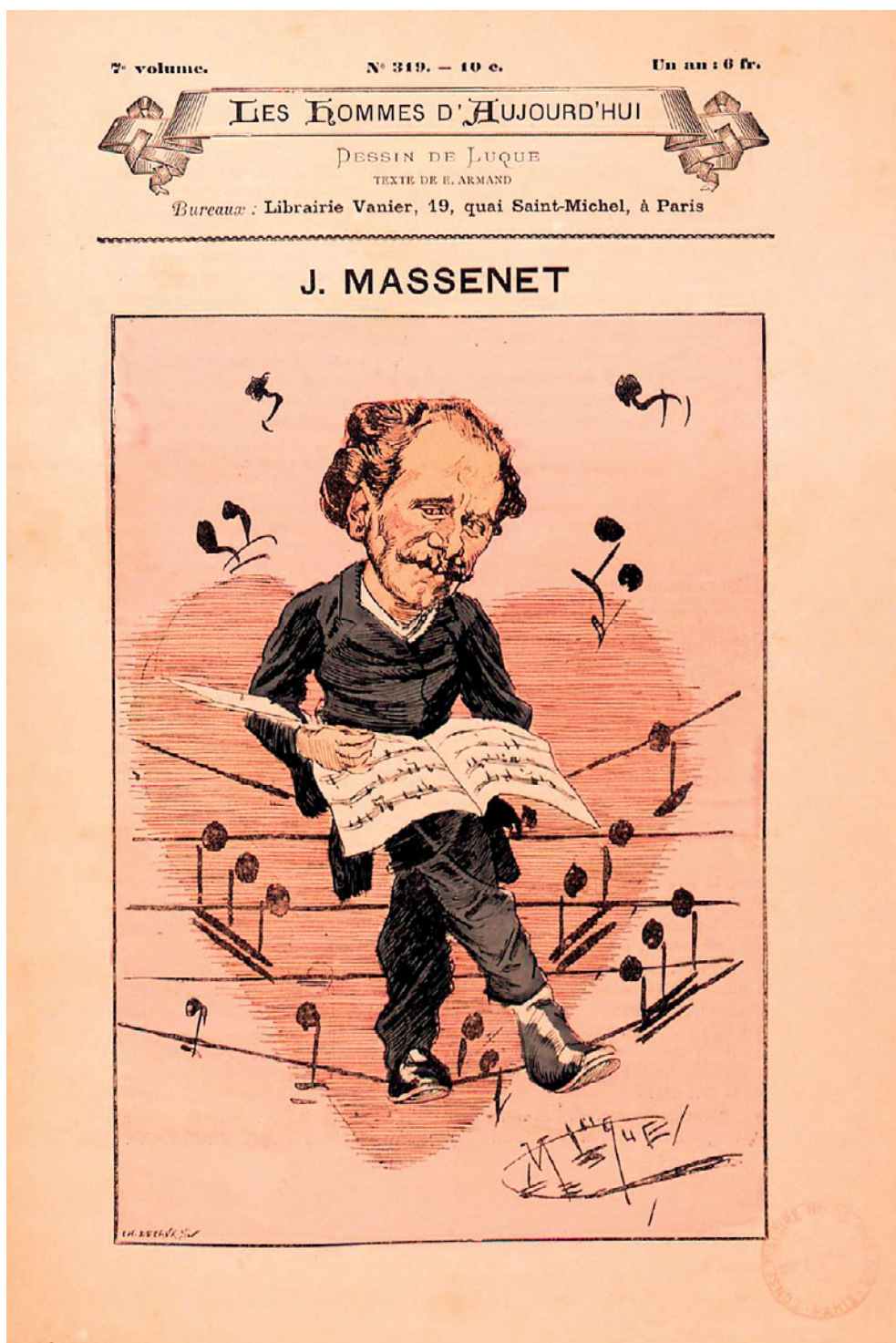


Fig. 6: (colour online) Manuel Luque, 'J. Massenet', *Les Hommes d'Aujourd'hui*, 7^e volume, no. 319, n.d. [1887?] (courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France)



Fig. 7: (colour online) Coll-Toc, 'Le Cid à L'Opéra', *La Nouvelle Lune*, 15–30 November 1885 (courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France)

national theatre, conferred this public stature upon him. The simultaneous success of *Manon* at the Opéra-Comique contributed further to the accrued prestige of the composer,⁴⁰ but it was the work performed at the Opéra, *Le Cid*, which was singled out in the caricatural press to commemorate Massenet's success and status, despite the work's divided critical reception.⁴¹ Once again, many caricaturists focussed on the dancing 'almées' with bare midriffs, yet simultaneously decried the great national treasure Corneille being reduced to belly-dancing.⁴² Bast's cover image of *Le Cid* (which is somewhere between a charge and a cartoon parody) for *La Silhouette* echoes this sentiment, as Corneille – his weightiness in French cultural heritage represented by the ream of volumes of his works stashed under one arm – descends from heaven upon hearing that Massenet has 'stolen' his work.⁴³ Appalled by the way his Alexandrine verse has been treated in the libretto and by the musical setting, Corneille is consoled only by the sight of Rosita Mauri dancing, which makes him forget his grievances.

After the success of *Esclarmonde* at the Opéra-Comique, as the official opera of the 1889 Exposition Universelle, Massenet was again enthroned at the Opéra with *Le Mage* in 1891.⁴⁴ Recognition of the authors Massenet and Jean Richepin in this high-profile national house reached beyond the satirical papers which routinely ran articles and images connected with opera, to *Le Don Quichotte*, a radical republican and anti-clerical weekly. In the cover image (Fig. 8) by the journal's general editor Charles Gilbert-Martin, Richepin, who was yet to garner the accolades of Republican society (such as election to the Académie Française⁴⁵), is, however, foregrounded, put on a stylish pedestal and garbed in ancient attire strumming his lyre. Massenet, on the other hand, wearing (rather shabby) everyday clothes, stands a short way behind Richepin; a barrel organ in the shape of the Opéra is perched on a very basic table; and Massenet is turning its handle. Massenet is thus already seen as an accompanist to Richepin's rising star, and not an inspired one at that, but merely someone churning out street music.

⁴⁰ On the reception of *Manon*, see Jean-Christophe Branger, *Manon de Jules Massenet, ou Le Crépuscule de l'Opéra-Comique* (Metz, 1999), 133–202.

⁴¹ That Massenet, as a prominent composer with a triumphant career, could be more easily identified with the hero of *Le Cid* than with any character in *Manon* may have also contributed to the choice of work used to commemorate the composer and his success. Steven Huebner briefly discusses the reception of *Le Cid* in his *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle*, 75–6. For a highly critical, satirical and caricatural review of the opera, see U.T., 'Le Cid à l'Opéra', *La Vie parisienne*, 23e année, no. 50, 12 December 1885, 698–702, with a composite double-page image by Sahib.

⁴² See Henriot, 'Le Cid. Musique de Massenet', *Le Journal amusant*. In the last image of this cartoon, the opera director Pedro Gailhard is seen in a bubble pulling the strings of the 'puppets' on-stage; according to Henriot, he is the true puppet master behind Massenet's success.

⁴³ Bast, 'Le Cid' à l'Opéra, *La Silhouette*. The simultaneous success of *Manon* at the Opéra-Comique is suggested by its scrunched scroll which Massenet shoves into his pocket while the *Le Cid* scroll is carried proudly under his arm.

⁴⁴ See Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle*, 103.

⁴⁵ Richepin was not elected to the Académie Française until 1908, whereas Massenet had had a seat at the Académie des Beaux-Arts since 1878. See Jean-Christophe Branger, 'Massenet (1842–1912): Une vie', in *La Belle Époque de Massenet*, ed. Christophe Ghristi and Mathias Auclair (Montreuil, 2011), 17–27, at 19.



Fig. 8: (colour online) Charles Gilbert-Martin, 'Les Auteurs du Mage', *Le Don Quichotte*, 18^e année, no. 873, 21 March 1891 (courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France)

This ‘imbalance’ was, nevertheless, redressed by a parody of Gilbert-Martin’s drawing, ‘Convoitises américaines’ (American Jealousy), which appeared in *Le Triboulet* the following day (22 March 1891, Fig. 9). A certain artistic hierarchy is re-established between Massenet and Richepin who are pictured in modern dress, each man perched upon a corner of a diminutive Opéra building. They stretch out their arms to one another; Richepin’s giant feather quill and Massenet’s enormous single demisemiquaver with its notehead aloft cross in a symbol of harmony, or at least of equal combat. This unity may be directed against the American novelist, playwright and librettist, Francis Marion Crawford, who is lurking in the background. In 1885 he published a two-volume, English-language novel (in London, which does not appear to have been translated into French) titled *Zoroaster*.⁴⁶ This image, captioned ‘Crawford would like to be paid some royalties!!!’ (*Crawford voudrait toucher des droits d’auteur!!!*), is unprepared anywhere else in the journal and seems guilelessly to feed the reader a snippet of background knowledge from those ‘in the know’. However, it also subtly calls into question the artistic integrity of both authors equally for a work on which a huge amount of public resources had been conferred and which had been hailed as a new manifestation of national artistic genius.

This charge is representative of *Le Triboulet*’s habit of throwing in a drawing to be read alone, with a short caption but no extended accompanying text to contextualise the image, often to pernicious ends. A week after the publication of ‘Convoitises américaines’, *Le Triboulet* again featured a small drawing of Massenet (Fig. 10). ‘Massenet devant Massenet’ (Massenet before Massenet) represents the composer on bended knee before an ‘altar’ – a table, topped once again by a barrel organ – upon which is placed a bust of himself complete with a radiating halo (made of wire), with the composer swinging an incense burner towards the marble version of his head. A candlelit music stand adds to the pseudo-church imagery, and a hard-bound score of *Le Mage* lies on the floor. These sorts of images strike the death-knell of Massenet’s uncontested popularity, and they mark the turning point in his career when critical attention tended to be just that, critical rather than eulogistic. By the time of the premiere of *Thaïs* in 1894, Massenet’s reputation, if not his artistic position, in the French cultural landscape had changed further, and much for the worse. The opera’s premiere came in the immediate wake of the controversial publication in French of Max Nordau’s *La Dégénérescence* which systematically catalogued a range of ‘artistic perversions’ and the ‘physical degeneracy’ of contemporary artists.⁴⁷ Thus, the supposed decadence of Massenet’s formal style dominated press reception of *Thaïs*, which comprised an unusually

⁴⁶ Maurice Marais’s cartoon of *Le Mage* (*Le Charivari*, Fig. 4) also referred, in its last image, to Crawford’s accusation of plagiarism, but affirmed that Crawford had subsequently admitted he was in error.

⁴⁷ Max Nordau, *La Dégénérescence*, trans. Auguste Dietrich, was published by Félix Alcan in two volumes in December 1893 and March 1894, even though both volumes carry 1894 as their date of publication. See my *Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition at the Opera: Massenet’s Hérodiade and Thaïs* (Weinsberg, 2004), 157–240.



Fig. 9: A.V., 'Convoitises américaines', *Le Triboulet*, 14e année, no. 12, 22 March 1891, 10 (courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France)

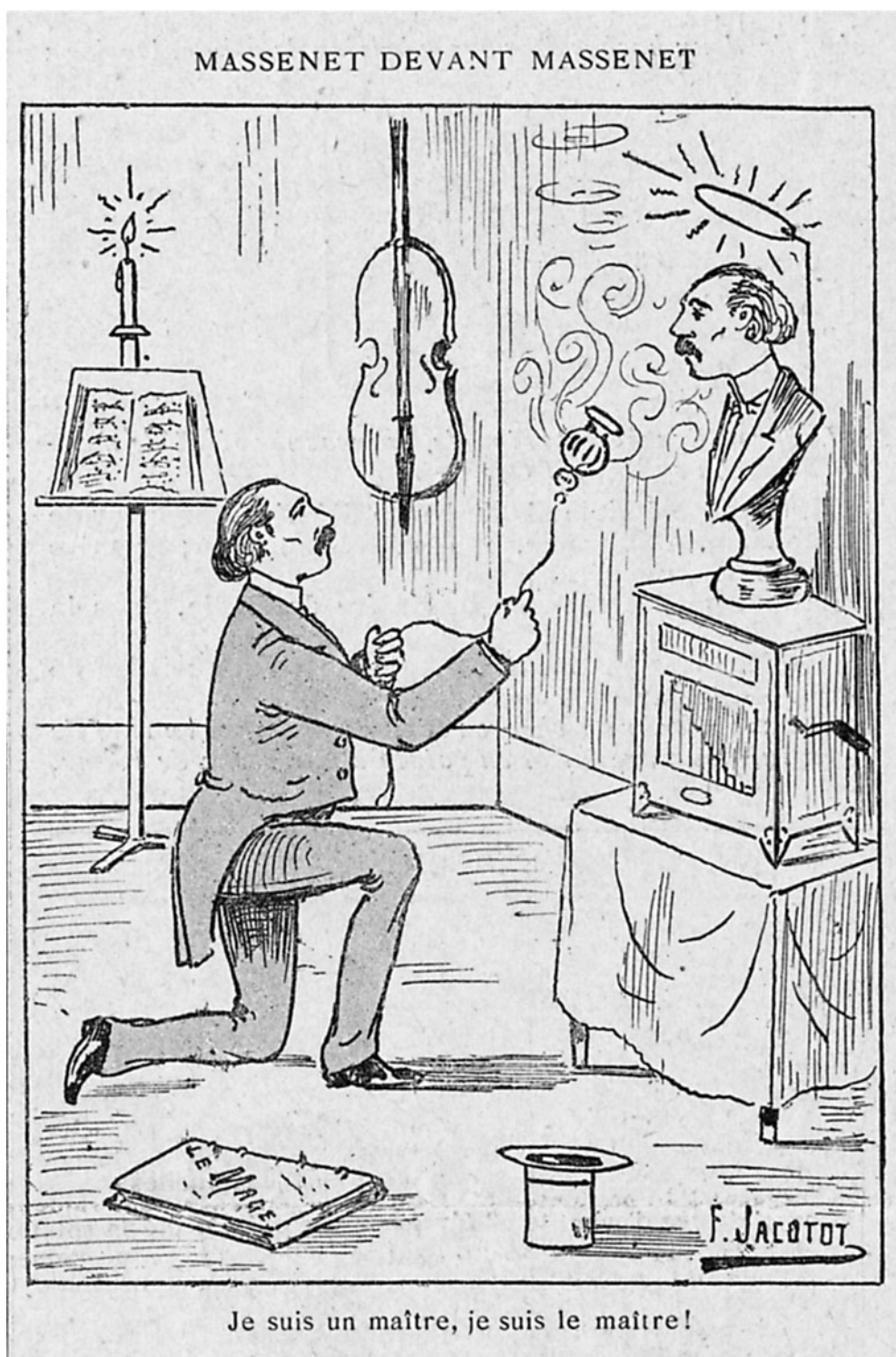


Fig. 10: F. Jacotot, 'Massenet devant Massenet', *Le Triboulet*, 14e année, no. 13, 29 March 1891, 10 (courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France)

large number of caricatural and parodic drawings.⁴⁸ The published charges and cartoon parodies drew on this rich contextual backdrop (as well as on Massenet's personal relationship with his leading lady Sibyl Sanderson, providing a graphic window into 'insider information') to question the composer's position at the head of a national school which was increasingly searching, with varying levels of success, for ways to renew itself in the post-Wagnerian era.⁴⁹

Thus, the way in which charges function can be much closer to political caricature which, through the use of satire and irony to objectify, mock and ridicule, is invariably judgemental or ameliorative in intention.⁵⁰ A certain strand of the press caricatures of Massenet and his works from the 1890s, therefore, had the purposes not only to entertain but also to expose and challenge accepted standards and to promote (particularly French) aesthetic integrity. This vivid form of amusement was a powerful tool for self-analysis and auto-censorship in Parisian artistic society, in which Massenet remained a key player and resolutely popular with audiences until the early years of the twentieth century. Thus, although the critical written press increasingly called Massenet's works into question, Stop continued to draw parodies of them until the highly innovative and successful staging of *Cendrillon* in 1899 by Albert Carré at the Opéra-Comique.⁵¹ Massenet, therefore, remained a physical presence in the artistic landscape, and his public successes continued to be commemorated in the caricatural press, despite a waning reputation in critical circles, with the result that readers of the light-hearted satirical press 'received' and 'consumed' his operas in this way until the turn of the century.

Entertainment and Elitism

At the height of his career, Massenet and his operatic triumphs were celebrated by Republican society, but more than that, the composer's works were sanctified and reified in the public imagination not only through their physical presence in France's most prestigious cultural institutions but also in their visual presence in periodic journals and newspapers where Massenet and his works were memorialised, commemorated and commodified, through caricatural and parodic media, as musical artefacts. Inherent in this metamorphosis of musical materials from the public to the private, from the monumental to the intimate, was a juxtaposition of distinct

⁴⁸ For detailed treatment of the Parisian caricatures following the première of *Thaïs*, see my 'Opera, Caricature and the Unconscious'.

⁴⁹ For discussion of *Thaïs* in a post-Wagnerian context, see Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle*, 135–59.

⁵⁰ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 53. Political caricature at the French *fin de siècle* – destined to shock, to provoke a new awareness of a situation and to incite change – issued from the milieu of counter-culture, from the very French world of the 'contre-pouvoir', from journals such as *Le Balai*, *Le Don Quichotte*, *Le Troupière*, *Le Pilon* and *Le Grelot*. The authorities (the police at the beck and call of the politicians since the abolition of censorship) constantly called into question the existence of these journals, seizing their publications and even imprisoning their editors.

⁵¹ See Jonathan Parisi, 'Mettre en scène *Cendrillon*: d'Albert Carré (1899) à Benjamin Lazar (2011)', in *Massenet aujourd'hui: Héritage et postérité*, ed. Jean-Christophe Branger and Vincent Giroud (Saint-Etienne, forthcoming).

and often irreconcilable qualities such as convention and fashion, entertainment and edification, high culture and low culture, and mass appeal and elitism.

Parodies of opera, however, came from within the consensual world of the arts and politics, from an establishment which in no way wanted to question its own existence, even if it was capable of pointing out its own foibles. Dan Harries describes parody as ‘conservative transgression’, and in this reading of parodic cartoons of opera, it would seem that conservatism triumphed.⁵² Henri Maigrot (Henriot) was a lawyer by training and a former ministerial secretary to the powerful but controversial Ernest Constans, as well as an intimate friend of the establishment composer Ernest Reyer; he received ‘la legion d’honneur’ in 1899.⁵³ Louis Retz (Stop), also a lawyer with formal artistic training, employed his talents not only in drawing parodies of opera but also by continuing the tradition of Cham’s (pseudonym of Amédée de Noé) ‘Salons comiques’ or ‘Salons pour rire’. Cham’s parodies of paintings exhibited at the annual Paris salon were published in *Le Charivari* during the 1860s; by reiterating the conventions of fine art and mocking the ‘out of the ordinary’, they performed similar cultural work to operatic cartoon parodies and contributed to the reinforcement of a traditional and academic aesthetic in the fine arts.⁵⁴ Like other caricaturists, Stop had also designed costumes for productions of Offenbach operettas and had even written plays and libretti.⁵⁵ Stop and Henriot, as well as many of their colleagues, were men who came from inside the system, who were part and parcel of it; and their journals, and the caricatures and parodies contained within them, were conceived by men who went to the opera, who were part of the operatic world, and who chose to trade in the art and the politics of opera. There were many other illustrated and satirical journals – such as *La Chronique amusante* and *Le Courrier français illustré* – however, that did not dare touch the high arts of the Parisian opera houses and establishment theatres such as the Comédie-Française.⁵⁶

Thus, opera parodies and caricatures can be read as memorialising gestures on the part of a cultural and cultured realm. Such gestures encourage a commemorative stance, and their reiteration indicates a devotional quality in relation to that which is commemorated.⁵⁷ Distinct from the world of political satire, parodies of Massenet’s operas were an affordable and amusing consumer product in popular form for an elite, presenting an alternative but nevertheless unchallenging view of the artistic establishment which brought the singers, dancers, musicians, authors, composers and directors, as well as their trials and tribulations, directly into the

⁵² Dan Harries, *Film Parody* (London, 2000), 120. Harries nevertheless warns against assuming that conservatism will win out over transgression.

⁵³ Emile Bayard, *La Caricature et les caricaturistes* (Paris, 1900), 212–14.

⁵⁴ Michel Melot, *L’Œil qui rit: Le pouvoir comique des images* (Fribourg, 1975), 89; Marie Luise Buchinger-Früh, ‘La Peinture du Second Empire dans les caricatures du *Charivari*’, in *La Caricature entre République et censure. L’imagerie satirique en France de 1830 à 1880: Un discours de résistance?*, ed. Philippe Régner (Lyon, 1996), 338–44, at 343.

⁵⁵ Bayard, *La Caricature*, 216–18.

⁵⁶ Such journals tended to stick to moral satire, often aimed at the mid- to lower bourgeoisie, and often traded in social and sexual behaviour and acceptable titillation.

⁵⁷ Philippe Dujardin, ‘Glossaire’, in *Le Geste commémoratif*, 475–504, at 482.

fin-de-siècle home. These artefacts provided a valuable and valued window on operatic culture of this period for readers whose familiarity, particularly with the detailed cartoon parodies, fuelled their operatic literacy. Parody, as a humorous but largely respectful means of reception of opera, in commodified form, not only memorialised the composers and the works that were lampooned, but also served to bolster the genre and its conventions for future audiences, as well as for those patrons who rarely set foot in the opera house.